

Save the Planet and Cultural Traditions While Teaching English

These days, scientists frequently share dire climate change findings, and the media covers severe weather events that can be attributed to global warming. An equally important—and often underreported—aspect of this crisis is the loss of cultural traditions.

In this webinar, we will:

- examine English teachers' roles in preparing students to help slow or change the course of the current climate crisis
- define environmental education and describe how it can be integrated into the EFL curriculum
- explore educators' readiness to teach this topic and identify professional development gaps
- consider how to help students focus on local aspects of ecological challenges



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Melissa is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer-Macedonia; was a U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow in Russia; and was an English Language Specialist in Thailand. She is a TESOL Standards Professional Council Member and a TESOL Grant and Proposals Reviewer.

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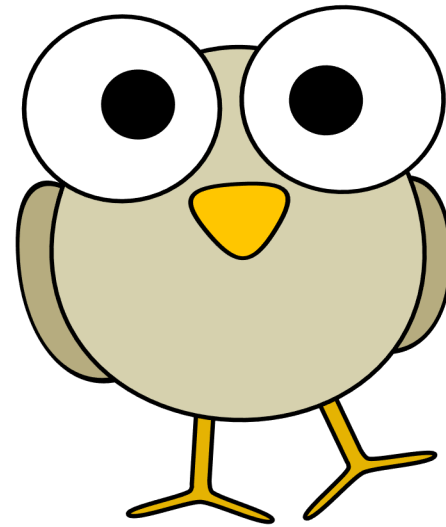


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How do you feel about the overall health of the world?

Maybe one of these statements describes you:

- It seems rather hopeless; we're doomed.
- I'm not worried; it is just the normal cycle of things.
- Things seems bad, but we can turn things around.



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These are some of my thoughts:

- The EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service announced last month that 2022 was Earth's fifth-hottest year on record.
- People tell me that it's the natural cycle of the planet.
- We have the knowledge and the ability to improve the future of the planet.

Agenda

- Review environmental education and its integration into curriculum, textbooks, and educators' training.
- Define place-based learning and discuss its benefits.
- Identify environmental issues and ways to encourage action.
- Examine some local environmental challenges that threaten cultural traditions and how to address those problems.

Environmental Education

A process that allows for exploration of environmental issues, promotes a belief that by **taking action** you can make a difference, and introduces positive changes that will **improve the environment and the planet.**

Environmental Education Curriculum and Textbooks

Country 1	Country 2	Country 3	Country 4
Environmental Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity & Awareness - 35% • Knowledge - 20% <i>Understand the world & related concerns</i> • Ecological Skills - 33% <i>Use language for the topic</i> 	Environmental Awareness	Environmental Awareness
<p>No curriculum/materials</p> <p>Environmental Education is not usually integrated into the ELT programs</p>	<p>Ecological Contribution - 12% <i>(combining the three categories to take action)</i></p>	<p>Minimal attention to the environment in the top selling EFL textbooks</p>	<p>Environmental Education can be a subject or integrated into ELT programs</p>

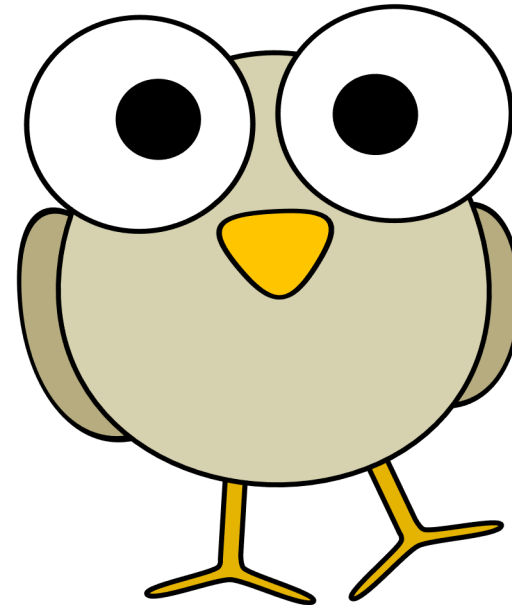
Where and How to Integrate Environmental Education into your textbook

- Skills
 - Productive (speaking and writing)
- Possible units for integration
 - Weather
 - Animals
 - Food
 - Geography
 - Jobs
 - Sports and Health



Let's stop and reflect!

What challenges might you face in teaching environmental education in your classroom?



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Some obstacles to teaching Environmental Education

- Lack of subject knowledge of ecology and preservation of the environment.
- Lack of formal preparation for pre-service or in-service teachers to teach EE with innovative and engaging strategies.
- Lack of support from administration or parents to incorporate EE into their lessons and curriculum.
- Lack of curriculum or textbooks.
- Lack of time for teachers to create curriculum, lessons and materials.

One Approach: Place-Based Learning

An approach to learning that takes advantage of the local community to create authentic, meaningful and engaging situations for students to apply their content knowledge.

Principles:

- Community as a Classroom
- Learner-centered
- Inquiry-based
- Local to Global

You are the expert in your area of the world! I am providing examples of environmental and cultural issues in different places in the world that may guide you on your journey.

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Activity 1: Warm-up speaking activity

Purpose: Help students move from awareness to action. Many students don't know how to apply what they know.

Time: First 10-15 minutes of class for 4-5 days

Frequency: Repeat at the beginning of each unit

Level: Suitable for all levels

Skills: Speaking, climate change vocabulary, teamwork, problem solving



Warm-up speaking activity

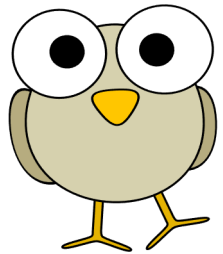
Day 1: As a class, make a list of what you know about the environment and climate change and discuss in small groups.

Day 2: The teacher picks one item from the list. Students work in groups to decide where in their community they see this problem.

Warm-up speaking activity

Day 1: As a class, make a list of what you know about the environment and climate change and discuss in small groups.

Day 2: The teacher picks one item from the list. Students work in groups to decide where in their community they see this problem.



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What environmental topic would you have your students discuss?

Warm-up speaking activity

Day 1: As a class, make a list of what you know about the environment and climate change and discuss in small groups.

Day 2: The teacher picks one item from the list. Students work in groups to decide where in their community they see this problem.

Day 3: Working in their same groups, students strategize how to change the situation.

Day 4: Each group presents their ideas to the class in 2-3 minutes.

Day 4:

Students present their ideas to the class.

Group 1

“We see plastic bags at the supermarket.

We will take a reusable bag instead and tell our friends to do the same thing.”

Group 2

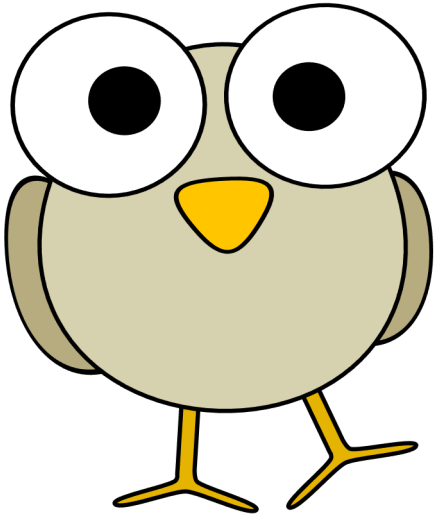
“One place we see plastic in our community is people drinking out of little plastic water bottles.

To decrease all this plastic use, one easy solution is to carry reusable water bottles with us all the time.”

Adaptation Ideas

- Group presentations on Day 4 can include one of the following:
 - Create a poster
 - Write and perform a short skit
 - Make a video
- For online classes, have students work in breakout rooms or collaborative documents, then post a short video for the whole class to view.

Your Turn!



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What ideas do you have
for presentations?

Activity 2: Everyday Action Research Project

Purpose: Help students move from awareness to action. Many students don't know how to apply what they know.

Time: Project work: 20 minutes each class for 5 days. This depends on your students ages and ability to work on this project.

Groups: Students work independently or with a partner

Level: Suitable for all levels

Activity idea from ¡Colorín Colorado!

Everyday Action Research Project

Instructions

- Choose a topic
- Find a related environmental issue
- Decide on action steps

Note: Students must be specific about the topic and actions.

Example

Topic: Crochet

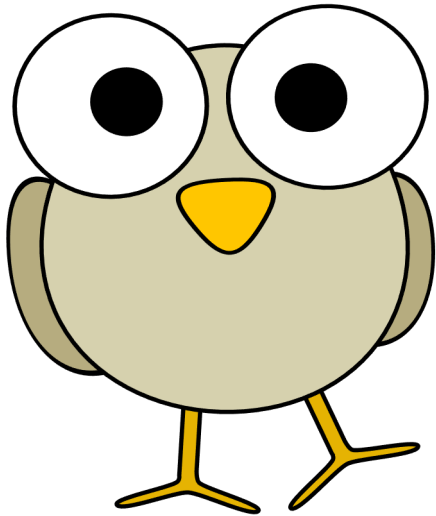
Environmental issue:
Yarn production



Action Steps:

If I found that mass produced yarns are made in faraway places, I could start using yarns from locally sourced yarn shops.

Your Turn!



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How would your
students benefit from
doing this activity?

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Biodiversity

(all the different kinds of life in one area)

Biodiversity in Balance

In the spring, birds migrate north to mate, nest and raise their young.

The birds arrive when the caterpillars are eating the leaves of the trees.

The birds rely on the caterpillars as food for their babies.

Biodiversity out of balance

If the winter is warm, the trees' leaves appear earlier. The caterpillars hatch earlier and become butterflies sooner.

When the birds arrive, there won't be enough food for their babies. The bird population will begin to decrease.

Birds eat insects. Fewer birds, more insects. Insects eat crops (corn, wheat, rice). Less food for people.

Activity 3:

Biodiversity and Environmental Problems

Purpose: Help students consider how all living things are connected and depend on each other.

Time: 2 30-minute lessons

Level: All levels with appropriate scaffolding

Skills: Speaking, writing for academic purposes, compare and contrast, prediction and climate change vocabulary

Directions – Part 1

1. Teacher brainstorms a list of environmental issues and creates a worksheet.
2. Teacher works with the whole group to complete the first one, then students work with a partner to complete the worksheet.

Environmental Problem	Effects who or what?	Local, Regional or Global problem?	Why should we care?
Flooding			
Habitat loss for animals			
Light pollution			
Extreme heat			

Directions – Part 2

3. Students choose one of the issues to illustrate. The students will design two pictures: one will show biodiversity in trouble and the second will reflect biodiversity in balance.
4. Students will write about their illustrations. They might use the If_____, then _____ sentence construction.
5. Students do a gallery walk and with a Post-it note, leave one specific comment on the response.

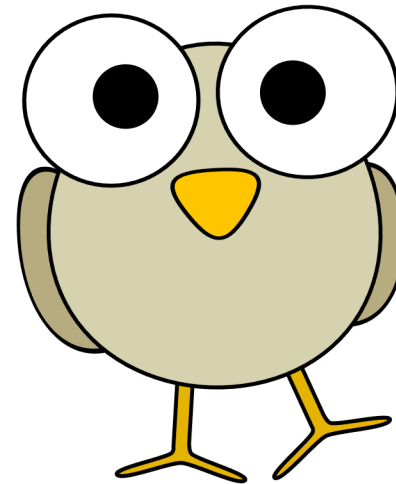
Scaffolding and Adaptations

- The chart could have several answers supplied for more limited English-speaking students. Or it could be left blank for more advanced students.
- For more limited speakers, pictures will accompany all the issues and the column headings.
- For students with more English: a written response that uses descriptive language.
- **For online**, have students work in breakout rooms on collaborative documents. As the document is shared, students can write their responses in the chat box.

Let's stop and reflect!

What is an issue in
your community that
affects its biodiversity?

Put your response
in the chat box.



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Activity 4: Solving a local/regional environmental and cultural issue

Purpose: Help students consider how environmental problems can affect local traditions and culture.

Time: Unit on Food (six weeks?). Activities are integrated into daily lessons.

Level: All levels with appropriate scaffolding. Younger students will need more assistance from parents.

Skills: Speaking, letter writing, writing for academic purposes, problem solving, teamwork, food specific vocabulary, climate change vocabulary

Part 1: Solving a local/regional environmental and cultural issue

Topic: Cabbage shortage in South Korea

1. Present students with background information about the issue.

- Due to extreme temperatures and heavy rains, there is less cabbage.
- Kimchi is made with fermented cabbage and eaten about seven times a week.
- Making kimchi is a family activity and is central to Korean cultural heritage.
- Farmers may need to raise other crops, such as apples.



Part 1 Continued

2. Students develop ideas to address the cabbage shortage in South Korea.

- Could students have a school garden where they could grow cabbage?
- Could they work with a local farmer?
- Could they work with someone who makes kimchi so they could learn how to make it for their school?
- Could they help educate the community to build awareness of the issue and work collectively with the community to take action?

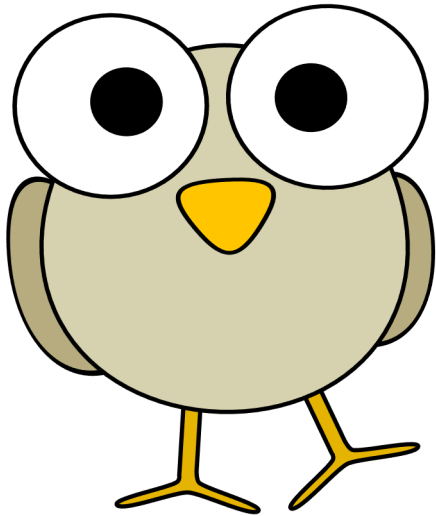
Part 2: Solving a local/regional environmental and cultural issue

- Step 1:** Writing a letter or preparing a presentation for the school administration to obtain permission to have a school garden to grow cabbage and the other vegetables in kimchi.
- Step 2:** If permission has been obtained, contact experts in their community who could assist with designing and planting a garden.
- Step 3:** Once they have their first harvest of cabbage and other vegetables, they will learn how to make kimchi.
- Step 4:** Develop Public Service Announcements, short student-created videos (30 seconds to 1 minute), to make their community aware of their actions.

Extensions and variations

- It may be impossible to have a garden at your school; the students could still work through the steps of the process.
- Students could reach out to the local government to have a community garden.
- Students could learn the history of this important food.

Your Turn!



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How would you adapt this activity for your context?

Activity 5:

Make art to promote the environment

Purpose: Help students consider how environmental problems can affect local traditions and culture.

Time: Unit on geography or jobs (six weeks?). Activities are integrated into daily lessons.

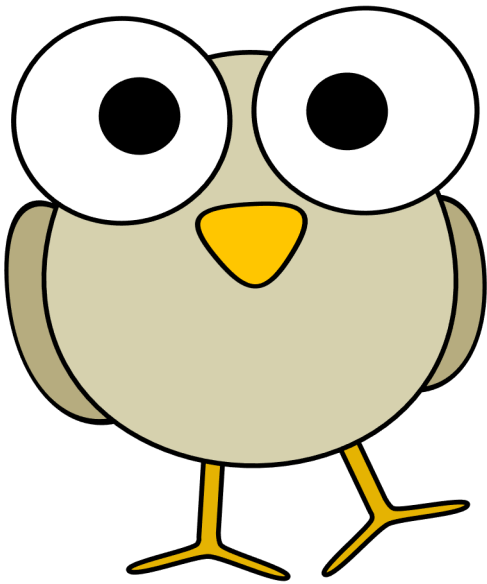
Level: All levels with appropriate scaffolding.

Skills: Speaking, writing (scripts or lyrics), problem solving, teamwork, art-specific vocabulary, climate change vocabulary

Why use art?

- It allows a more emotional perspective of the issue instead of just the facts and science.
- Art can be visual, performance and musical which provides many ways for students to express their ideas.
- Students can employ an innovative way to provide community education.

Your turn!



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How do you integrate art into
your lessons?

The loss of birch bark from paper birch trees



Day 1

Guest speaker or teacher gives a presentation on the paper birch tree and its importance to Indigenous or First Nation people.

The presentation would include the following information:

- Due to environmental issues and the effects of climate change, paper birch trees are losing their birch bark. This is seen in many regions in the United States.
- Traditionally, many Indigenous cultures have used birch bark:
 - In sacred rituals, fires, and medicines
 - To weave baskets and make canoes
 - As a canvas for storytelling and pictures
 - To make things to sell to others

Activity Plan

Day 1: Guest speaker or teacher gives a presentation on the paper birch tree and its importance to Indigenous people.

Days 2-3: Students, working in small groups, choose a purpose of the paper birch tree (canoes, rituals and fires, medicines, storytelling and art and basketweaving) to research.

Days 4-10: Students begin to explore and create their preferred art form to express their knowledge and feelings about the tree.

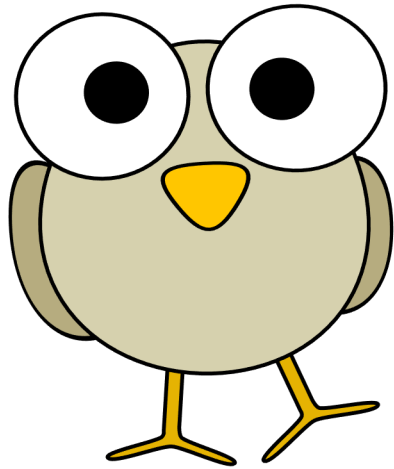
Days 11-14: Organize an event where they display/perform their art for their school and/or community.

Day 15: Event Day.

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One last reflection



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What strategy for teaching environmental education would you like to try tomorrow with your class?

References

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Thank you!

Questions or concerns?

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Reflection Questions

1. Have you received any professional development—apart from this webinar 😊—about teaching environmental topics in ELT settings? Where might you find resources or connect with other teachers who are interested in these topics?
2. Have cultural traditions or activities been affected by environmental challenges where you live? What types of activities could you do in class to raise awareness or take positive action in relation to the issues?
3. Do your English language learners enjoy projects that involve art? What types of art activities can you use to explore environmental language and themes?



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